

# SKILLS OF CONVERSATION FROM ISLAM'S VIEWPOINT

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**ABSTRACT:** There is no doubt that verbal communication is among the most valuable benefits God has best owed to the human being. Although speaking seems easy, but to use this divine blessing properly, so that the justice be done in terms of content, choosing words, responsibility and other consequences is too difficult and needs various skills that all people should be know them. Since the only sources of these skills are revelation, prophetic traditions and sayings of the infallible Imams (PBUT), it is necessary that through research and by looking at Islamic resources, identify these skills and made them available to lovers. A library research method is used for the purposes of the study which was conducted through referring to the scripture and traditions. According to the study, it was revealed that some skills including fulfill responsibilities, vitalize, say right and talk of believes are necessary for speaking and people should achieve these skills to avoid harms. It is also necessary that individuals learn correct speaking skills, extracted from the heart of religion, in order to not to be a puppet in the hands of devils and their words lead to bliss for speaker and listener.

**KEYWORDS:** skill; conversation; Quran; traditions; communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

The verbal communication is one of the benefits God has given to the human beings and the importance and position of the speaking has necessitated that Almighty God, after reminding “creation” blessing, refer to “speech”: (Al-Rahman, verse 2). The power of speech and talking fluently is one of the human being is considered one of the privileges of human being and since human being is able to understand generalities and conform and express it with details, it is called “speaking animal” in logic. As much as the principle of speaking is valuable, the manner of speaking in terms of content, method of expression, responsibility, and other issues and consequences is also important.

According to Imam Ali (PBUH) the words reflect the personality of the person. “The personality of individuals is hidden under their tongues” (Nouri, 1408 AH). The words people use not only reflect their personality, but also create their future and responsibilities. Therefore, from past many discussions are raised regarding conversation, propagation, guidance, communication, and the skills which should be observed when speaking to affect the audiences.

Of course, human knowledge learns how to influence the souls, and sometimes applies psychological techniques to spell the audiences. Such impacts may have negative impacts on audiences as we have observed many of them throughout the history. Nevertheless, less is said about the fact that what big responsibilities the words can have for human being that Quran says “every word you say is in the presence of an angel that records it and you should be responsible regarding them on the Day of Resurrection” (Surah Qaf, verse 18); and what kind of speaking it is that proves the supremacy of man's place over angels. The skill we talk about in this study is to attain the attraction of the listeners so that we don't violate their freedom and leave their wisdom free for choice, and create a soul connection which leads the audience toward a real life.

Since the speaker wants to communicate with the soul, his knowledge should be derived from beyond materials and this knowledge only is available in In the Qur'an and Ahlul-Bayt school. Therefore, we aim to consider verses and narratives from this point of view to identify different dimensions of conversational skills from this angle and present them to the enthusiasts.

The main question of the study is: What are the necessities of a decent speech from Islam point of view? And from religion point of view, what are the skills that individuals can use to talk with other human beings, so that besides conveying their intention and achieving to their desires, they can fulfill their divine responsibilities and pave the way for bliss of themselves and listeners?

## II. METHODOLOGY

A documentary and library methodology was used for the purposes of the study. This study was conducted based on the Holy Quran and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the words of infallible Imams (PBUT).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

### **INTRODUCING THE TERMS**

**Skill:** In Persian dictionaries skill is defined as to be master in a work, to be skillful, and dexterity (Moein, Mohammad, 1981).

**Communication:** A process through which we convey information, senses and feelings through verbal and nonverbal messages to other people (Hasan Zadeh, Ali Akbar, 2014).

**Verbal communication:** The sum of relationships obtained through speaking, and refers that human being achieve the ability required to convey his messages and internal desires, in the light of correct knowledge and correct behavior.

**Interpersonal communication:** a process in which information, concepts, and emotions are shared with other people through verbal and non-verbal messages. In other words, communication is any kind of reciprocal action which involves transmission of message (Hasan Zadeh, Ali Akbar, 2014; Owen Hargie, Christine Saunders and David Dickson, 2010).

## **III. RESULTS**

### **PROFICIENCY IN SPEECH**

Although speaking is one of the first skills that a person learns, but like many other things, some pre-knowledge and preconditions are necessary to take advantage from this useful God-send blessing. To speak properly and to say proper speeches are possible only by those who have obtained its skills and those who embark on it without obtaining required skills, may harm rather than profit. Speaking and propagation skills are important from religion point of view. When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) conquered Mecca and organized the initial works he decided to go for Honin war. He appointed Attab Ibn Usayd, an eighteen-year-old man, as ruler of the Mecca and when some people objected, he emphasized on his qualifications and insisted on his decision. The notable point is that despite all qualifications that Attab had for management and ruling the city, maybe he wasn't so efficient regarding propagation. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), chose Mu'adhibnJabal for teaching Quran and describing Figh. Also in some cases, he took help from revelation to choose qualified missioner. For example, to communicate "Surah Bharat" to the polytheists of Mecca, first Abu Bakr was appointed for this mission, but revelation angel informed him that this mission should be done merely by Ali or himself. Therefore Prophet Muhammad cancelled Abu Bakr's mission and gave this mission to Ali (PBUH) (Baladhuri, Vol. 1, 1394 AH).

#### **Speaking or silence**

A general rule cannot be issued about the fact that speaking or silence which one is preferred. In narratives silence is referred to as wisdom comfort and speaking is referred to as soul comfort (Sadough, Al-Faqih, Vol. 4, p. 402). The other narratives sometimes have emphasized silence and have ordered that the tongue should be prisoned (Kulayni, Vol. 2, 1984) and the other times speaking is emphasized and silence is not confirmed (HurrAmeli, vol. 12, 1403 AH). Accordingly, it can be concluded that each one of them is good in its place. Of course, if the ground is prepared, undoubtedly speaking is of priority and what paves the way for serving people and improve happiness, usually realize through speaking. Imam Ali (PBUH) in this regard says: "... and among the worships possible to do by body members of the man, no one is easier and at the same time more valuable beside God than speaking because It is evident to all that God did not put anything between himself and his messengers to reveal the secrets and express the truths and to declare his hidden sciences nothing but words and revelation and clarifying materials occurs through speaking; as there is no mediator but speech exists between prophets and their people. Here, it turns out that if this blessing is used properly, it will be best measure and the most delicate worship but if one use it improperly, no sin will be heavier and closer to punishment in front of God and more reprehensible and annoying in front of people than speaking" (Misbah al-Sharia, chapter 46).

#### **A) Dimensions of the skill**

From religion point of view, speaker and listener who are predisposing factors of message transfer, should have skill form some aspects.

## 1. Responsibility

One of the most essential skills is that the person should be able to speak in a way that consider himself or herself responsible in terms of words and meanings because the words influence audiences and pave the way their future acts. Human beings should be accountable before God, regarding what they say. Quran says: “(Man) does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record]” (Surah Qaf, verse 18). Also, from Quran point of view, those who mislead other peoples will receive double punishment (Surah Al-Araf, verse 38). Imam Ali also referred to responsibility: “Truly, you will be inquired because of your words, then utter no words unless they are good words” (Tamimi Amedi, 1987). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says “Nobody becomes a good person, unless his soul become good and the soul doesn’t become good unless his words be true...” (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 175)

## 2. Vitalize

Those words worth to be heard that prepare the ground for bliss and life of the listener (Surah Anfal, verse 24). If a word doesn’t prepare the ground for bliss of the listener and cause sin and devil, neither the speaker is permitted to utter it, nor is the listener permitted to listen to it. The acme of this skill is when all the interests of the speech, even the compensation that seemingly is sought, reach to the listener. Prophet Muhammad asked no compensation from people for guiding them, except to love his beloved ones and says: “what is mentioned as compensation and reward for this divine mission benefits you” (Surah Al-Shura, verse 23). Although his opponents brought him a lot of obstacles and conducted the extreme insults and harassment regarding him but he didn’t give up their guidance even for one minute and even in toughest conditions when Quraysh infidels had broken his forehead with stone, he prayed for them and said “My God, forgive them because they don’t know” (Sunan Ibn Majah, part 5, page 154).

When conquering Mecca, Prophet Muhammad said: I say the same words Joseph said to his brothers: “No blame will there be upon you today. Allah will forgive you” (Sobhani, Jafar, *Forugh-e Abadiyat*, vol. 2, p. 729) and announced general pardon and said: “Go, you are freedmen” (Ibn al-Atir, *al-Kamal fi al-Tatirak*, p. 246).

## 3. To say the truth

The other point is the ability and preparedness to say right words. The speaker should be able to realize right from devil and on this path have no fear of dangers. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says: “The most valuable Jihad is right words said before a tyrannical ruler” (Tousi, vol. 6, 1984). From religion point of view, to say the truth is a necessity, although the listener doesn’t like it. God’s consent should be considered when talking, and if obtaining consent of people amount to a waiver and divine wrath, that words won’t be good words (Majlesi, vol. 75, 1404 AH). The notion that those are skilled in speaking that can speak to everyone so that they like it, is not a correct perception from Islam point of view. According to Islam, honesty and truthfulness are the main criteria, even though may some people don’t like the sayings. Of course, this doesn’t mean violence and tyranny because tolerance is highly recommended in Islam and one of the features of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been his tolerance regarding people. Tolerance means that one should be patient regarding harassments he receives from other people and even turn a blind eye at them (Naraqi, 2007, p. 208). To have tolerance regarding all people, especially when talking to those disagree with, is a desirable religious and moral trait. Although tolerance is a necessity and leaving it leads to “violence”, but according to Quran verses and narratives, tolerance regarding personal affairs and some kinds of the social issues, where the right of people or divine laws are not violated, but when it concerns to Islamic values and principles of the religion, tolerance is improper and denounced. In latter, tolerance turns to a denounced phenomenon called “Modaahene” (flattery) and is strictly forbidden (Bihar, vol. 29, p. 464 and Vol. 39, p. 137).

God has ordered his prophet Muhammad to fight against infidels deserved to be fought against and Hypocrites and says: “O Prophet, use all your efforts to fight the unbelievers and the hypocrites and take a hardline with them...” (Surah Toubah, verse 73). Also, according to Quran, to be kind with oppressors leads to hell fire, where it says: “And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped” (Surah Hud, verse 113). Also it is said that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to get angry for god sake, so that the color of his face changed (Tabarsi, *Makarem Al-Akhlagh* 1/54). When Prophet Muhammad observed such kinds of violations, not only didn’t have tolerance regarding them but also had intense reactions. Some examples are as follows:

A) When returning from Tabuk War, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came across three people who had not taken part in war and had violated Jihad order. He immediately expressed his anger and even didn't talk with them and following him other Muslims did the same. This kind of taking position tightens the noose on them and they wandered in deserts and repented (Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Vol. 4, p. 334).

B) When Islam army was leaving Khyber land, the soldier who was responsible for fastening the palanquin got hit by an arrow and he was killed. All people said blessed he is because of such a death, but Prophet Muhammad said: I'm not agree with you because the shirt he is wearing booty and belongs to public treasury. He has taken this shirt unjustly and in the Day of Resurrection it will surround him like fire. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) didn't pray for his body (Ibn Hisham, *al-Sayra al-Nunbuyah* 3 p. 353).

C) Once a woman from Bani Mahzum tribe was sentenced for robbery, Osama bin Zayd, who was one of the favorite companions of the Prophet, asked for forgiveness. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) became angry and said: Are you going to intercede regarding a punishment determined by God? (Ibn Hisham, 1976, vol. 4, p. 185).

#### 4. Relations with hearts

Holy Quran declares friendship with those who utter good words and themselves believe in them and on the contrary condemns those who seek dignity through doing sin and ensures that they will be in hell (Surah Al-Baqareh, verses 204-206). Speaking should begin with a holy goal. In order to make our words believable for audiences, we should believe in them and have no doubt about them in all conditions. Prophet Muhammad himself was committed to this trait. According to God, Prophet Muhammad from very beginning believed in Islam and Quran which later began to promote them (Surah Al-Baqareh, verse 285). Prophet's words which arise from his heart were so pleasant for people and penetrated in their hearts that the leaders of disbelief although felt threatened for the existence of their idols, and because had no logic in fighting, resorted to bribery (Nasiri Razi, p. 58, 2010). When in battle of Siffinone of the Sham people accused Imam Ali and claimed that Imam doesn't pray, "Hashem Ibn Atbah", one of the Imam followers, talked to him in a way that he became one of the friends and followers of the Imam Ibn al-Athir, vol. 3) (Ibn Abi Alhid).

#### 5. To confirm the sayings by action

Holy Quran blames those who don't do what they say: "O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do? (Surah Al-Saff, verse 2). In other verse it says: "Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture?" (Surah Al-Baqrah, verse 44). This method not only is not effective, but also shows invalidity of speech. From religion point of view, the words should become confirmed with action and the speaker himself does what he says. One of the traits of the Prophet Muhammad was that he more than others were committed to what he said. If he considered night praying a supererogatory act for other people, he considered it an obligatory act for himself. The day he had eaten date, he didn't advice the sick child not to eat date. When he wanted to encourage people to pray, he prayed himself and then said: "pray as I did" (Majlesi, Vol. 83, 1404 AH). In tolerating the difficulties he was stronger than other people and during the fights he was in the heart of battle and was a resort for Muslim fighters. The art of infallible Imams in their saying was that they were always pioneer in action and before others implemented the orders they believed are useful for prosperity and perfection.

#### 6. Audience analysis

One of the important points regarding speaking is that the speaker should awake the sleepy conscience of the audiences and lead them toward truth and realities.

Prophet Muhammad, with his perfect knowledge of the audiences, used different methods to guide them. He says: We, the prophets, have mission to talk with people according to their wisdom" (Kulayni, *Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 27). On the other hand, taking advantage form this skill, Prophet Muhammad inclined some of the famous Jewish people to Islam, so that people such as "Mukhayriq" believed in Islam and was killed in Battle of Uhud while he was fighting for Islam army and bequeathed all his wealth to the Prophet (Ibn Hisham, 1976, vol. 3, p. 51). When a young man requested permission for doing sin and depravity, the companions became angry from this rudeness and impudence, but the Prophet in cold blood stimulates his sense of zeal and prevents him from doing so; the young man when hears the words of Prophet says: "O Prophet, so far "adultery" was the sweetest thing for me, but now it

is the most hated thing in my eyes: (Tafsir Nemooneh, vol. 3, p. 42). In addition, he considered the level of perception and understanding of the audiences and in verbal communications adjusted his sayings accordingly.

## 7. Insight enhancement

The main motto of the Quran is: "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong." (Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 256). "Indeed, we guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful." (Surah Al-Insan, verse 3).

The purpose of Islam from fight and battle was to remove the barriers of tending toward religion, so that the people freely and discreetly choose the right way. "Say, "This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight" (Surah Yusuf, verse 108). And if an unbeliever needed to study and research, he would give him the chance to hear the right words and after thinking and research, choose between Islam and disbelief the one he realized as right. "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety." (Surah Al-Tawbah, verse 6). These verses are the bases of Prophet' behavior. His work was to disseminate knowledge and increase insight. This method was common even for the stubborn enemies. Safwan bin Umayyah was one of the most violent enemies of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He played a key role in most wars happened against Muslims. He hanged a Muslim in front of the eyes of the people. He was one of ten people who were excepted from general amnesty. Therefore, he escaped from Mecca and went to Taif. The cousin of Safwan asked for pardon from Prophet and it was accepted by him. Then Safwan returned to Mecca and said "I need two months for research. If Islam was a legitimate religion, I will accept it." Prophet Muhammad said "I give you a four month deadline". Safwan said: this kind of propagation is the method used by divine prophets. He said Shahada and became Muslim (Waqidi, Al-Moqazi, vol. 2, p. 853).

One of the most important factors in insight enhancement is to consider the criteria of good words; such as: eloquence and fluency (Surah Al-Muddaththir, verse 24); to avoid profanity and saying bad words (Surah Yusuf, verse 23); to be lenient and gentle but at the same time clear and decisive (Surah Taha, verse 44). Stability and integrity such as: thinking before talking (Nahj al-Balagha, wisdom 40); knowingly speaking (Surah Al-Baqarah, 113); and observing justice and seeking justice especially when acting as an arbitrator (Surah Al-Anaam, verses 115, 152).

## 8. Optimism

The people that all their traits are desired and lack negative traits are rare, if any, among non-infallible Imams. Common people besides positive traits and moral virtues more or less have some negative traits. A guide and teacher will be successful when he identifies positive aspects of the people and highlights them, in order to attract the students and help them to flourish their abilities. Prophet Muhammad used to avoid from hinting to negative traits and stimulate emotions, when talking to people and inviting them to Islam. Highlighting the positive traits paves the way for attracting people and he used to take advantage of it properly.

Family members of Hatam Tayi were heathen. They stood against Islam. Adi Ibn Hatam defeated and escaped to Sham and his sister was arrested. She was brought to Medina. One day this prisoned woman introduced herself to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and recalled positive traits of her father and said: My father used to help poor people and to care about helpless people. Prophet Muhammad without reminding their stubborn against Islam or raise other issues, admired this positive trait and in return ordered to release her. When her brother became aware that the leader of Islam world has admired his father and has respected his good deeds, surrendered himself and became Muslim and served it.

### B) Speech harms

According to religious culture, speaking should occur based on enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and the outcome of believers words should be inviting to the right and patience (Surah al-Asr, verse 3). In this regard, red lines must be respected because they not only inhibit correct and valuable communication, but also cause misleading; for example:

#### 1. Saying bad words

One of the skills in speaking is taking advantage of valuable words. Imam Sajjad in his Treatise of Right says: "A believer should keep the respect of his tongue". In Quran vituperation is banned and it is not permitted even against

infidels enemies and if imprudence of a Muslim person caused that they insult to Islamic sanctities, he will be responsible (Surah Al-Anam, verse 108). Regarding the importance of using good and nice words, Quran says: “And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better...” (Surah Al-Fussilat, verse 34). Somewhere else it says: “And speak to people good [words]” (Surah Al-Baqrah, verse 83). Imam Ali (PBUH) says: “The tongue of a believer is behind his heart and the heart of an ignorant person is behind his tongue because a believer thinks before he speaks, then if it was good and useful then utters it and if it was bad and useless avoids from saying, but an ignorant and hypocrite person utters everything comes into his mind and doesn’t care which one is useful and which one is useless. He continues “Prophet Muhammad says: The faith of a person won’t become right unless his heart becomes right and his heart won’t become right unless his tongue becomes right...” (Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 175, p. 19).

## **2. Violate Privacy**

In Islam some privacy are considered to inhibit people from committing sins regarding the opposite sex. The arrogance principle and taking distance from opposite sex and removing evil attractions are considered in relationships ((Nahj al-Balaghah wisdom 234). Observance of chastity is also ordered (Surah Al-qasas, verse 3, and Surah Yusuf, verse 23). In Quran regarding the wives of Prophet Muhammad it is said: “O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech”. Although this orders are said regarding Prophet’s wives and their special position is not a secret, but it is a general order and it is a necessity for women to observe the privacies in terms of tone and content, so that it doesn’t stimulate virtueless people.

## **3. Hostile disputes**

The Qur'an not only has not forbidden dialogue and rational arguments, but also has based inviting people by Prophet Muhammad on wisdom and good sermons and in case the discussion led to argument, it invites to the best argument. The argument in terms means using the givens of a person against him; namely to use the preliminaries accepted by the opposing party to prove your saying and convince him. This kind of arguments are accepted by rational people to prove their claim, but sometimes these arguments detract and so-called lead to controversy. God has banned controversy and in Haj season has put it on a par with debauchery and from religion point of view it is not permitted in speaking. This controversy, as Raghbi points in Al-Mufradat, is the same discussion and conversation. According to the narratives, this behavior sometimes is considered argumentation and the other times as show-off and controversy that the speaker should from it. According to Imam Hussein (PBUH) different kinds of controversy and their losses are as follows: controversy and hostile discussions are four types: first, you and the opposing party both are aware of the truth, nevertheless discuss about it, in this case this disputation causes that you leave your friend and seek his scandal and disgrace your knowledge; second, you and the opposing party don’t know the fact and both are not about it, in this case you reveal your ignorance and feud due to your ignorance; third, you know a fact that the opposing party doesn’t know. In this case, you are oppressing him because you want through argumentation reveal his fault and make him ashamed; fourth, the opposing party know a fact and he is right but you don’t accept. In this case, you have not observed his respect and dignity. It is impossible that a devout person commit any of these four. Everyone who be fair and accept the truth and leave controversy, has strengthen his faith and has saved his wisdom (Noori, vol. 9, 1408 AH, p. 74).

Where controversy happens a wise man should quit it, even though he is right. This manner is a sign of humility and self-righteousness.

## **4. Fallacy**

In the logical sense, if a person provides reasons when he or she is discussing with other person, but what says are wrong in fact, or intentionally says something wrong to mislead the listener, it is called fallacy. Some cases can be mentioned as modern examples of fallacy: to equate religious experience with divine revelation; to compare interpretability of the religion with Disagreement between scholars; to equate pluralism and liberalism with the Sharia of Samaha and Sohela; to equate authority and despotism; to equate fundamentalism and fanaticism; to equate piety and religiosity; and to equate observing religious rituals with hypocrisy, etc. (Kalantari, 2006, pp. 260-261).

## **5. Pretense and flatter**

Respectful and courteous treatment is a necessity, but it should not turn to flattering. Imam Ali (PBUH) says: “when you want admire someone, your statements should be very short and also if you want blame someone do it in short (Amudi, Ghurar Al-Hikam, narrative 10730). Once a person told Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that I have said some poems praising God and admiring you. The prophet said, read the ones praising God, but leave those admiring me. Also, when a person admired Imam Ali (PBUH) in his presence and said “you are the lord and we are the servants and by you God saved us from abjection. Imam said “the person that God is big in his eyes, other people are small in his eyes. The worst rulers are those that people flatter them and I don’t like to be among them. Don’t talk the same you talk with tyrant kings (RezvanTalab, 2007, pp. 209-210).

#### **IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Given the points extracted from Quran and narratives, it turns out that although speaking seems an easy work, but to talk right and properly is a difficult work and needs training and practice. In order to fulfill our duties regarding this divine blessing, besides learning speaking techniques we should pay special attention to its divine aspect and our responsibilities regarding it, and through practice and repetition institutionalize skills such as responsibility, vitalize, connect with the hearts, confirm the words with action. With the assumption that all words we say will be recorded by special angels and we will be responsible for them in front of the God, we only should say words that lead to bliss and improve spiritual life. To that end, with the help of speaking ability, we should create spiritual relationship with the heart of the audiences and confirm our words with our actions. Although to attract the audiences and satisfy them is necessary for communication, but we are not permitted to ignore the truth or turn to controversy. Also, it is necessary that we obtain skills that save our words from losses and inhibit us from resorting to saying bad words, violating the privacies, fallacy and controversy, so that our words be right and accepted by God.

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